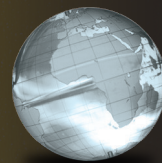


GLOBAL  
EDITION



# Technical Communication

FIFTEENTH EDITION

John M. Lannon

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Chunking on the Web versus chunking on a printed page

Chunking information to fit the medium

When you work on a document to be delivered as hard copy (print), you can assume that readers will take longer to read the material than they would with, say, a tweet or a Facebook posting. In general, that’s because the printed page is easier on the eye and causes readers to slow down. Research continues to show that when people read on screens, on the other hand, they do more skimming and have less patience for long blocks of text (Liu).

Yet most documents get converted to PDF and uploaded to an organization’s Web site. You may also end up writing content that is solely intended for publication on a Web page or on social media. So, be sure you have a clear understanding of the final delivery medium for your document and organize your content in visual chunks that best fit the medium. See the section “Organizing for Social Media and Global Audiences” later in this chapter for more on organizing for social media. Also, see Chapter 13 for information on page design and Chapters 24 and 25 for details on writing for blogs, wikis, Web pages, and social media.

# Providing an Overview

## 10.6 Provide overviews of longer documents

Show the big picture

What readers want to know immediately

Once you’ve settled on a final organization for your document, give readers an immediate preview of its contents by answering their initial questions:

- What is the purpose of this document?
- Why should I read it?
- What information can I expect to find here?

Readers will also have additional, more specific questions, but first they want to know what the document is all about and how it relates to them.

An overview should be placed near the beginning of a document, but you may also want to provide section overviews at the beginning of each section in a long document. The following is an overview of a long report on groundwater contamination.

A report overview

### About This Report

This report contains five sections. Section One describes the scope and scale of groundwater contamination in Jackson County. Section Two offers background on previous legislation related to groundwater. Section Three shows the most recent data from the Jackson County Groundwater Project, and Section Four compares that data to national averages. Section Five offers recommendations and ideas for next steps.

Variety of overview types

Overviews come in various shapes and sizes. The overview for this book, for example, appears under the heading “How This Book Is Organized” in this book’s Preface. An informative abstract of a long document also provides an overview, as in the sample formal report in Chapter 21. An overview for an oral presentation appears as an introduction to that presentation (see Chapter 23, “Outline Your Presentation”). Whatever its shape or size, a good overview gives readers the “big picture” to help them navigate the document or presentation and understand its details.



# Organizing for Social Media and Global Audiences

## 10.7 Organize information for social media postings

As noted earlier in this chapter, a 2005 study showed that when people read on screens they do more skimming and have less patience for long blocks of text (Liu). In the 10+ years that have followed this study, the number of social media platforms has increased dramatically. Today, most people get their news, updates, and technical information from Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, and other social media platforms—not from print media. These readers are moving quickly across small chunks of content, making rapid-fire decisions about what information to delve into more deeply and what to skip or ignore. For technical writing, your best bet is to think about 1–2 sentences, where the first sentence is the topic sentence and the second sentence is a brief summary that includes a link to additional, more detailed information. Visuals, so long as they are accurate and appropriate, can help you organize a social media post into something that helps readers understand the facts and access additional content.

How to organize social media posts

Social media is viewed by a worldwide audience, and different cultures have varying expectations about how information should be organized. For instance, a paragraph in English typically begins with a topic sentence, followed by related supporting sentences; any digression from this main idea is considered harmful to the paragraph's unity. But some cultures consider digression a sign of intelligence or politeness. To native readers of English, the long introductions and digressions in certain Spanish or Russian documents might seem tedious and confusing, but a Spanish or Russian reader might view the more direct organization of English as abrupt and simplistic (Leki 151). Even same-language cultures might have different expectations (do a search on “British English for business” to discover some key differences in how U.S. versus British businesspeople approach the organization of content).

Special considerations when writing for global readers

## Checklist

### Organizing Information

Use the following Checklist as you organize information:

- ☐ Does the document employ a standard or varied introduction/body/conclusion structure? (See “The Typical Shape of Workplace Documents” in this chapter.)
- ☐ Will the outline allow me to include all the necessary data for the document? (See “Outlining” in this chapter.)
- ☐ Is this outline organized using alphanumeric or decimal notation? (See “The Formal Outline” in this chapter.)
- ☐ Have I created a storyboard to supplement my formal outline? (See “Storyboarding” in this chapter.)
- ☐ Is the information chunked into discrete, digestible units for the proper medium (print, PDF, Web, social media)? (See “Chunking” in this chapter.)

- ❑ Does each paragraph include these features? (See “Paragraphing” in this chapter.)
  - Topic sentence (introduction)
  - Unity (body that supports the topic sentence)
  - Coherence (connected line of thought leading to a conclusion)
- ❑ If appropriate, does the document include an overview, offering a larger picture of what will follow? (See “Providing an Overview” in this chapter.)
- ❑ Have I considered how social media and my audience’s specific cultural expectations should influence my choices about organization? (See “Organizing for Social Media and Global Audiences” in this chapter.)

## Projects

For all projects, check with your instructor about whether to present your findings in class, bring drafts to class for discussion, upload your project to the class learning management system (LMS), and/or use the LMS forum or discussion boards to collaborate and review each activity below.

### General

For each document below, use the outlining strategy described in the “An Outlining Strategy” section of this chapter to list the topics that need to be covered. Then, organize your list into a formal outline (see “The Formal Outline” in this chapter) most suited to readers of this particular type of document.

- Instructions for a new smart television
- A report analyzing the economic and environmental arguments for domestic solar panels
- A local government report on public transport policy and associated funding
- A proposal for a new school at the edge of a small town

### Team

In a team of 3–4, prepare a sales brochure for a new housing estate that will consist of 150 upmarket houses to be built in three phases. The brochure must contain:

- the number of each type of house
- a plan for each type of house
- artists’ impressions of houses
- a site plan
- details of building phases
- details of plot sizes
- start and completion dates for each phase
- plans to consider environmental demands
- local amenities
- specifications for each type of house
- local transport types and routes
- building company details

Use the outline feature from a word processing program to create a practical and attractive outline for the sales brochure and a brief summary of the intended style for class discussion. Appoint one group member to present the outline in class.

## Digital and Social Media

Find a recent Facebook post, tweet, or other social media post from a research group or a government agency. Analyze the posting in terms of the earlier section in this book (“Organizing for Social Media and Global Audiences”). How long is the post? Does it contain a topic sentence and some form of a summary? Is this post organized in a format that makes you want to click to read more? Now, find the report or study referred to and compare the report’s summary section to the content of the social media post. How accurate is the post relative to the overall study? What information was left out? Present your findings in class.

## Global

Find a document that presents the same information in several languages (assembly instructions, for example). Even without being able to understand all of the languages used, see if you can spot any changes made in the use of headings, the length of paragraphs, or the extent to which information is organized and chunked. Interview a language professor or a professor in the business school to find out why these choices may have been made.

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# Chapter 11

## Editing for a Professional Style and Tone



Artifacts Images/Photodisc/Getty Images

“The amount of time I spend on revision depends on the document. Internal emails and memos get at least one careful review before being distributed. All letters and other documents to outside readers get detailed attention, to make sure that what is being said is actually what was intended. There’s the issue of contractual obligations here—and also the issue of liability, if someone, say, were to misinterpret a set of instructions and were injured as a result. Also there’s the issue of customer relations: Most people want to transact with businesses that display ‘likability’ on the interpersonal front. So, getting the style just right is always a priority.”

—Andi Wallin, Communications Manager for a power tool manufacturer

Editing for Clarity  
Editing for Conciseness  
Editing for Fluency  
Finding the Exact Words  
Adjusting Your Tone

**Guidelines** for Deciding about Tone  
**Guidelines** for Avoiding Biased Language  
Global, Legal, and Ethical Implications of Style and Tone

Digital Writing and Editing  
**Checklist: Style Projects**



# Learning Objectives

- 11.1** Write clear sentences that can be understood in one reading
- 11.2** Write concise sentences that convey meaning in the fewest words
- 11.3** Write fluent sentences that provide clear connections, variety, and emphasis
- 11.4** Use precise language that conveys your exact meaning
- 11.5** Achieve a tone that connects with your audience and avoids bias
- 11.6** Understand style and tone in a global, legal, and ethical context
- 11.7** Consider style and tone in a digital context

No matter how technical your document, your audience will not understand the content unless the style is *readable*, with sentences easy to understand and words chosen precisely.

Every bit as important as *what* you have to say is *how* you decide to say it. Your particular writing style is a blend of these elements:

- The way in which you construct each sentence
- The length of your sentences
- The way in which you connect sentences
- The words and phrases you choose
- The tone you convey

A definition of style  
  
What determines your style

Readable style, of course, requires correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling. But correctness alone is no guarantee of readability. For example, the following response to a job application is mechanically correct but hard to read:

Style is more than mechanical correctness